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Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

During the period under review, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa convened its eighteenth and nineteenth ministerial meetings and organized a subregional seminar on the implementation in Central Africa of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Through its Bureau, it continued to monitor political and security developments in the region.

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* A/58/150.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 57/88 of 22 November 2002 entitled "Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa", the General Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed its support for efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures at regional and subregional levels in order to ease tensions and conflicts and to further peace, stability and sustainable development in Central Africa. It also reaffirmed its support for the programme of work of the Committee adopted at its organizational meeting, held in Yaoundé from 27 to 31 July 1992 (see A/47/511).*

2. By the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1197 (1998), to provide the States members of the Committee with the necessary support for the implementation and smooth functioning of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), created in 1999 by the heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the early warning mechanism in Central Africa. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the States members of the Committee with assistance to ensure that they are able to carry out their efforts, and requested him to submit to it at its fifty-eighth session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report is submitted in compliance with that request. It covers the activities undertaken by the United Nations and the Committee since the submission of the previous report (A/57/161).

II. Action by the United Nations

4. During the reporting period, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which serves as the secretariat of the Committee, assisted the Committee with the organization of two ministerial meetings and a seminar on the implementation, in Central Africa, of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted in July 2001 at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. It also continued to provide advisory, substantive and technical support to the Committee and to collaborate with the secretariat of ECCAS on matters of mutual concern to the Committee, in particular, on questions related to peace and security. Through its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, the Department for Disarmament Affairs assisted the Committee in developing a two-year programme of activities to be carried out from May 2003 to May 2005 by the States members of the Committee in the implementation of the Programme of Action in their respective countries and at the subregional level.

III. Meetings of the Standing Advisory Committee

5. At its eighteenth ministerial meeting, held in Bangui from 26 to 30 August 2002, while reviewing the geopolitical and security situation in its respective member States, the Committee welcomed the positive developments in Angola, in particular, the signing on 4 April 2002 of the Memorandum of Understanding Addendum to the Lusaka Protocol for the Cessation of Hostilities and the Resolution

of the Outstanding Military Issues between the Government and the União Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA). The Committee commended the Government on its laudable efforts to create conditions that were conducive to the resumption of the peace process, national reconciliation and reconstruction. However, it expressed concern about the humanitarian situation in the country, in particular, the existence of large numbers of displaced persons facing malnutrition and poor health coverage and appealed to the international community to increase substantially its assistance to the Government.

6. With regard to the situation in Burundi, the Committee expressed deep concern about the deterioration of the living conditions of the people of Burundi and the pervasive insecurity caused by the continued attacks against the civilian population and the economic infrastructure. It hailed the efforts of the mediation team to obtain a ceasefire and restore peace in Burundi and encouraged the latter to continue those efforts in the context of the Arusha peace process. The Committee welcomed the progressive establishment of transitional institutions and expressed its support for the efforts of the Government of Burundi and all Burundians engaged in the search for a lasting peace. It invited the countries of the Central African subregion, particularly those of the Great Lakes subregion, to put pressure on the armed groups to conclude ceasefire agreements and help the Burundians restore peace through dialogue and reconciliation and to refrain from providing any direct or indirect assistance to the rebels. The Committee launched an urgent appeal to the international community and, in particular, to bilateral and multilateral donors to provide substantial support to the peace efforts and the improvement of the living conditions of the people of Burundi.

7. As to the situation in Cameroon, the Committee welcomed the climate of peace and stability prevailing in that country. It took note of the information provided by the delegation of Cameroon regarding the Bakassi situation between Cameroon and Nigeria and invited the two parties to refrain from any action that could heighten tension, pending the decision of the International Court of Justice, and also invited the two countries to respect the verdict of the Court.

8. With regard to the situation in the Central African Republic, the Committee welcomed the positive developments in the political and security situation in that country, characterized by ongoing political dialogue between the Government and the opposition and the gradual return of civilian and military refugees. However, it expressed concern about the precariousness of the general security situation, in particular, the proliferation of light weapons, which had resulted in an increase in the activities of gangsters and bands as well as the continuing tensions on the border with Chad. The Committee also expressed concern about the economic and financial difficulties facing that country. In that connection, it reiterated its urgent appeal to the international community and the Bretton Woods institutions to provide the Central African Republic with the essential financial support to allow it to resolve its serious financial problems, a sine qua non for peace, security and development.

9. Concerning the situation in the Republic of the Congo, the Committee welcomed the improvement in the general situation of peace and security, the gradual return of refugees and displaced persons, the continuing collection of weapons, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and the holding of general elections without incident. It was nevertheless troubled by recent terrorist attacks carried out in the Pool region and on the outskirts of Brazzaville. It also

expressed concern over the financial difficulties encountered by the programmes for the collection of weapons and the reintegration of former combatants. In that connection, the Committee urgently appealed to the international community to provide assistance to the Republic of the Congo to enable it to respond to all those challenges and to ensure the restoration of a lasting peace and conditions conducive to the country's harmonious development.

10. With regard to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Committee once again took note of the fundamental concerns of the Government and the people of that country regarding: serious human rights violations there, in particular, recent massacres in Kissangani and Bunia; the need for the prompt demilitarization of Kissangani; continued infringements of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country; combat involving rebel forces and other armed groups in the east and north-east of the country, clashes between ethnic groups, the deteriorating humanitarian situation and troop movements in the east of the country, violation of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, the Kampala Plan and the Harare Sub-plan; and the continued systematic plundering and unlawful exploitation of natural resources and other riches in the occupied part of the country. The Committee appealed to all parties to respect fully the relevant Security Council resolutions on the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It further appealed to the international community for assistance in the implementation of the peace process, especially in the areas of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of armed groups and the total and orderly withdrawal of all foreign troops.

11. Regarding the situations in Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, the Committee welcomed the prevailing climate of peace and stability in those countries. It also welcomed the signing, in July 2002, of the peace agreement between the heads of State of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which offered hope that the conflict between the two countries would soon be resolved. The Committee hailed the arrest of perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide by some States in the subregion and urgently appealed to other States of the subregion to do likewise so that those guilty of acts of genocide in Rwanda could be brought to justice.

12. As indicated above, during the reporting period, the Committee also organized a subregional seminar on the implementation, in Central Africa, of the Programme of Action adopted in July 2001 at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. The objectives of the seminar were to: (i) review initiatives undertaken by States members of the Committee in implementing the Programme of Action at the national and regional levels; (ii) identify major obstacles and challenges; (iii) identify priority areas for intervention at both the national and regional levels and areas requiring international assistance; (iv) develop a programme of priority activities for the implementation of the Programme of Action within Central Africa over the next two years; and (v) look into the possibility of establishing, within the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States, a regional mechanism to harmonize and coordinate efforts by individual member States and oversee the implementation of the Programme of Action.

13. At the conclusion of the seminar, the Committee adopted a two-year programme of activities to be implemented at the national and subregional levels.

The programme of activities identified the following priority areas: (i) the establishment of national commissions/structures to coordinate national policies to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons; (ii) the collection and destruction of arms; (iii) the updating, strengthening and harmonizing of national laws, administrative rules and procedures on the carrying, use, manufacturing and sale of arms and munitions; (iv) the strengthening of the capacities of security institutions in the control of small arms; (v) the promotion of transparency in the control of small arms through the creation of national arms registers and databanks; (vi) the promotion of the involvement of civil society in fighting against the proliferation and circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons; and (vii) the strengthening of transborder cooperation in the control of illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons. The report on the seminar is annexed to the report on the nineteenth ministerial meeting of the Committee (see A/57/823-S/2003/610).

14. With regard to the nineteenth ministerial meeting, the Committee noted the progress that had been made in most member States, in particular, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It welcomed the recent peaceful change of the presidency in Burundi from former President Pierre Buyoya to President Domitien Ndandaye; the signing on 7 October 2002 and 3 December 2002, of ceasefire agreements between the Government of Burundi and three rebel groups, as well as the return to Bujumbura of some of the leaders of the rebel groups. Nonetheless, the Committee once again expressed grave concern over the deterioration of the living conditions of the population and, in particular, the continued attacks by armed groups on civilians and the economic infrastructure. It called upon the Central African countries, in particular, those of the Great Lakes region, to put pressure on the rebel groups to conclude ceasefire agreements with the Government and to assist the people of Burundi to find peace through dialogue and reconciliation as well as to stop providing direct or indirect assistance to the rebel groups.

15. With regard to the situation in the Central African Republic, the Committee welcomed the positive actions undertaken by the new authorities, following the 15 March military coup, in particular, the appointment of a Prime Minister acceptable to all, the creation of a transitional Government consisting of different political and social groups in the country, the payment of salary arrears that had contributed to the fall of the previous regime and the gradual restoration of security in Bangui. It also welcomed the improvement in relations between the Central African Republic and Chad. However, the Committee noted that the country was still facing grave economic and financial difficulties. In that connection, it adopted a Declaration by which, among other things, it called upon the international community, in particular, the Bretton Woods institutions and the development partners of the Central African Republic, to increase their assistance so that the country might overcome many years of destruction and devastation by persistent armed conflicts.

16. The Committee noted the progress registered in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the signing in July and September 2002 of peace agreements between the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, and between the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, as well as the promulgation of the transitional constitution on 4 April 2003 and the swearing in, on 7 April 2003, of President Joseph Kabila as Transitional President. The Committee, however, expressed grave concern over the recent resumption of hostilities in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, especially in Ituri, the north and the southern Kivu; the massacres and other massive violations of human rights in Ituri; the degradation of the humanitarian situation in the eastern part of the country and the inadequacy of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) in relation to the situation on the ground.

17. The Committee appealed to all parties concerned to respect all Security Council resolutions pertaining to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and called upon the international community to continue lending its support to the peace process in that country, to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected population and to respond generously to the global appeal for the Democratic Republic of the Congo launched by the United Nations in 2002. Moreover, the Committee called upon the Security Council to change the mandate of MONUC so that it could be more responsive to the situation on the ground.

18. The Committee welcomed plans to send a Security Council mission and the United Nations Inter-Agency Assessment Mission to the region in early June. It expressed the hope that the Inter-Agency Mission would result in the creation, in Central Africa, of a United Nations subregional office that would coordinate peacekeeping missions and efforts of the various Representatives of the Secretary-General in the region. It also expressed the hope that the Security Council would seriously consider including all States members of ECCAS in the forthcoming International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region. To that end, it tasked the ECCAS secretariat with working very closely with ECCAS Ambassadors at the United Nations to ensure that concerns of the region were taken into account while preparing the terms of reference of the two missions.

IV. Programme of activities for 2003-2004

19. The Committee's programme of activities for the period 2003-2004 will be elaborated at the twentieth ministerial meeting, to be held in Malabo from 27 to 30 October 2003.

V. Administrative and financial matters

20. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued to provide funding, from the regular budget, for the two ministerial meetings, while the subregional seminar on the implementation in Central Africa of the Programme of Action adopted in July 2001 at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects was financed from the Trust Fund of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. The Government of the Czech Republic and the secretariat of ECCAS each contributed US$ 15,000 and $10,000, respectively, towards the convening of the seminar. In addition, the South African-based Institute for Security Studies covered the costs of participation of representatives of civil society from the region in the amount of $9,000. The Secretary-General greatly appreciates those contributions. Owing to serious financial constraints during the reporting period, the Committee has had to cancel a workshop on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and the standardized instrument for reporting military

expenditures. The workshop was scheduled to be held in Yaoundé in June 2003 at the estimated cost of $109,270. Efforts are currently being made to seek contributions from interested member States so as to enable the Committee to convene the workshop in the near future. The Secretary-General reiterates his appeal to Member States and intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations to contribute generously to the Trust Fund in order to enable the Committee to implement fully its annual programme of work.

VI. Conclusions and observations

21. **The Committee continues to play a vital role in promoting peace and security in Central Africa. It continues to serve as a forum for regular consultation and exchange of information and suggestions among the States members of ECCAS in the areas of peace, security and development in Central Africa. Its member States attach great value and importance to the continued existence of the Committee.**

22. **Since the establishment of the Committee in 1992, the General Assembly's continued support for the implementation of its activities has led to strengthened and closer cooperation in the areas of peace and security among Central African countries. However, much remains to be done if conditions for lasting peace, disarmament and development are to be achieved. It is incumbent upon the States members of the Committee to strive to become the driving force behind all peace initiatives and efforts in their region. It remains imperative for the international community to continue to lend its political, financial, technical and material support to promoting, peace, security, stability and development in Central Africa. For his part, the Secretary-General will continue to provide all the assistance he can.**